

and with our allies and others have suffered greatly as a result of the decision to attack Iraq based on an apparently false claim that it possessed weapons of mass destruction.

As a result, even the administration has been forced to back off just a bit from some of the bolder claims it made before the start of the war in Iraq.

In a much discussed memo released late last year, Secretary Rumsfeld wondered whether we were winning or losing the war on terror:

Are we capturing, killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrassas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us?

At a minimum, the administration's missteps in Iraq have greatly complicated the answer to this question, and attacking Iraq, at least in the short to medium term, may have made Americans less secure, not more, against terrorist threat.

The American people need to know whether attacking Iraq has helped our efforts against al-Qaida and made them more secure.

These are the critical questions currently confronting this administration.

Unfortunately, while the administration has chosen to make its accomplishments in the war on terror a centerpiece of its re-election campaign, it has resisted telling the American people precisely what it did and did not do to win this war.

It has resisted allowing the 9/11 Commission access to the policymakers and documents that can provide some answers.

It has refused to provide the families of the victims of September 11 and the American people with the information they deserve so they can judge for themselves the administration's record.

Rather than attacking those who raise questions about the administration's policies, President Bush and senior administration officials should do all they can to clear up these troubling questions.

The first step is to make themselves and any supporting documents immediately available to the 9/11 Commission, which is running up against a deadline for its important work of ensuring the American people that we do everything possible to prevent another September 11.

This includes having National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice testify publicly. It also includes having the President and Vice President appear privately before the full commission for as long as needed to clear up these critical issues.

America's soldiers have performed heroically in the defense of their Nation. All America stands united in our pride and gratitude for their service.

In order to be certain our Government has done and is doing all it can to defend us, Americans have a right to know more about our Government's priorities and actions in the months leading up to the attacks of September 11.

Americans have placed the security of this Nation in the hands of this administration.

That trust is a privilege, and alongside it comes the obligation to answer the questions and concerns of the American people.

To continue to refuse the 9/11 Commission's requests and to criticize those who raise legitimate questions about its actions merely adds to the doubt felt by an increasing number of Americans.

It is time for the administration to honor our citizens' right to know.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nevada is recognized.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we have three who wish to speak in morning business on our side: Senator STABENOW, Senator CORZINE, and Senator CANTWELL. I ask unanimous consent that on our side they be allotted 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered. The Senator is permitted to allocate his time.

The Senator from Michigan is recognized for 10 minutes.

MEDICARE SOLVENCY

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I rise today to express tremendous concern about the latest news regarding the Medicare trust fund and the solvency of the trust fund. We are now hearing that Medicare, in fact, will become insolvent 7 years sooner than we had been told last year.

During the time between last year and this year, there has been a Medicare bill passed by the Senate. I believe there is a direct correlation between what was passed, which I have deep concerns about, and the new number we are hearing about Medicare being jeopardized and becoming insolvent 7 years sooner.

We know that in the bill that was passed last year, there were payments for the first time to private plans so they could compete with traditional Medicare. We know that, according to the Congressional Budget Office, it in fact has cost 13.2 percent more for the private sector through Medicare+Choice to provide the very same services as traditional Medicare. Rather than saying we should go, then, with the most cost-effective way to provide health care services for seniors and use traditional Medicare, the response, unfortunately, from the Congress and the President was to subsidize private insurance companies and HMOs so they could compete more favorably.

Originally, it was \$14 billion taken away from providing prescription drug coverage for seniors, helping to pay for their medicine, taking those dollars away from other preventive services that could be paid for, other direct services that could be given to our sen-

iors, and it was put into providing subsidies for the private sector.

Now we see in the new numbers how all of this has changed with the revelation of the tremendous increase in the cost of the Medicare bill which we were told after it passed. We are now told the first estimate of \$14 billion being diverted is now really \$46 billion being diverted—\$46 billion not going to pay for our seniors receiving help with their medicine, to afford their medicine through Medicare, but being diverted to essentially privatize or help private plans be able to compete because it costs more to provide Medicare coverage and prescription drug coverage under private plans. We see greater costs there.

Then right at the time we need to be doing everything possible to leverage and lower our costs, we know this Medicare prescription drug bill actually says in the middle of the bill that Medicare is not allowed to group purchase, to get bulk discounts, which is astounding. Every time I say that to a group of people at home in Michigan, they look at me in bewilderment: What in the world were you thinking that you would not try to get the best possible price through a bulk discount? Yet we know that one of the reasons there is increased costs in this bill is because they are not doing bulk purchasing.

Why are they not doing bulk purchasing? Because the pharmaceutical industry does not want that to be done. They do not want us to get lower prices. They want us to pay the highest possible prices. So, unfortunately, this bill says that, which is another reason why I opposed the passage of the Medicare bill.

Over and over we are seeing situations unravel that cause me great concern, not only about the new dollar amount, the new substance in this bill, but also about the process that brought us to the passage of the Medicare bill. I will speak now to some of what we have been hearing and reading in recent days and weeks.

The Government's top expert on Medicare costs was warned he would be fired if he told key lawmakers about a series of Bush administration cost estimates that could have torpedoed congressional passage of the White House-backed Medicare prescription drug plan. This was written on March 12 of this year, just last week, in the Miami Herald. We know there were new estimates, new actual costs that were identified, and we were not told about them before the passage of this bill.

We know that between November 20 and 24 of last year, administration officials repeatedly stated without qualification that the prescription drug bill "will not cost more than \$400 billion over 10 years." In making these representations, administration officials relied on CBO estimates without citing the conflicting estimates from their own analysts. This comes from a special report Health and Human Services

Secretary Tommy Thompson gave at the time, as well as other news reports.

We then found out after the new year on January 29—not November, now we move up to January 29—the administration announced the Medicare drug bill would cost at least \$534 billion over 10 years—\$139 billion more, just as we find the new subsidies for private plans, insurance companies, and HMOs have gone up, and certainly there is no cost containment in this bill.

On January 30, the President indicated he learned of the new estimates only 2 weeks earlier, but yet we find on February 12 Secretary Thompson testified to the House Ways and Means Committee that they were given the final higher drug cost on Christmas Eve of 2003, which contradicts the President's earlier statements.

Then on top of having conflicting information about the cost and when the administration knew about the cost, we also hear from a colleague of mine in Michigan, Representative NICK SMITH, who said last fall unknown GOP colleagues had tried to bribe him into voting for the contentious prescription drug bill on November 22 by promising campaign help to his son who is running to replace his retiring father. This was reported in the Washington Post on March 15 of this year.

We now know there is an ethics investigation going on in the House of Representatives regarding this process. We know when this bill first came up in the House, they did not have the votes for it and kept the board open an unprecedented 3 hours plus to change votes, to get the votes for this Medicare bill.

Republican colleagues have said that if they had known the true cost at that time, they would not have voted for it. The cost was hidden. We did not find out what the true costs are, and then we see tremendous pressure on colleagues to vote for this bill, and now the Ethics Committee is looking into what happened in at least one circumstance.

Then we move to another area of great concern to me, and that is the advertising of this particular legislation, this new Medicare bill. According to the New York Times on March 16:

The administration then attempted to rally support and take political credit for the prescription drug plan with Government-produced TV ads masquerading as news reports. Actors were hired by the Department of Health and Human Services to pose as television journalists purveying facts, upbeat "news" segments about the expanded Medicare coverage.

I also have concerns because in that particular taxpayer-funded advertising, we have found, as a result of a GAO report and a request for investigation that we asked to have done on March 10, the GAO concluded that the Bush administration's Medicare advertisements contain notable omissions and other weaknesses. While they indicate they are not unlawful, they have notable omissions and other weaknesses.

One of my concerns about all of this is that we are seeing a lack of truthfulness

regarding the cost of this bill. Many of us had great concerns about this bill in the beginning. We had colleagues being told one thing and then finding out another, saying if they had known, they would not have supported the bill; high pressure tactics going on and an ethics investigation now related to what was done in the House; and then we see taxpayers' dollars being used to put forward less than accurate information.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator's time has expired.

Ms. STABENOW. I ask for an additional 1 minute.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Chair has no authority to allocate additional time. It has already been allocated.

Ms. STABENOW. Without objection, I ask for an additional 1 minute.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Chair is compelled to object. The time has been allocated.

Ms. STABENOW. I will simply indicate then I have deep concerns about this whole process, and now we find it affects the bottom line.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator's time has expired.

Ms. STABENOW. I urge colleagues to relook at this Medicare bill and what is in the best interest of seniors.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from New Jersey is recognized for 10 minutes.

Mr. CORZINE. Will the Chair inform me when I have 1 minute remaining of the 10 minutes?

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Yes.

Mr. CORZINE. I thank the Chair.

THE JOBS BILL

Mr. CORZINE. Mr. President, today we are talking on a series of issues where credibility is at stake. Frankly, I think the credibility of the Senate is at stake with regard to this jobs initiative we are debating on the floor of the Senate today.

I understand it is very possible we will not be able to move this most important legislation that is about creating jobs in an economy where Americans are not getting access to available opportunities to protect their families, help their families, or improve their quality of life.

We have seen far too little job creation. For us to back away from this initiative today would be extremely disappointing and, in fact, lead to a roughly \$4 billion tax hike for American business and for job creation.

I think it fits a pattern of failure and unfortunate emphasis with regard to the state of our economic affairs in this country. Apparently, we do not want to take a vote on providing overtime for 8 million Americans. That is what is keeping us from dealing with a fundamental jobs program.

We already overwhelmingly voted in this body to pull back from regulations that would strip overtime pay for 8 million working Americans. Because

we do not want to go on record about that, we are going to allow a \$4 billion tax hike that is going to end up undermining jobs. It is just the latest in steps of failed economic policy.

I think the administration, the President, ought to be demanding that we get this JOBS bill passed so we have the capacity to keep pushing forward on economic growth and, most importantly, job growth for individuals. This failure, in my view, comes against a backdrop that is remarkable for its, frankly, inanity and distorted perspectives with regard to economic policies that Senator JOHN KERRY has proposed in his current campaign for the Presidency.

I say "remarkable" because it is incredible to me that anyone with the economic record that this administration has, which has basically failed, would have the temerity to try to attack the policies that are very consistent with ones that produced 22.5 million jobs and created the greatest economic boon in the 20th century that this country had. There was growth in productivity, growth in real wealth, and growth in average median income for all Americans. It is hard for me to understand how, when we have gone from that kind of success to the failed policies we have today, that we are trying to attack some return to that effort.

I will review the record in specific. Since President Bush came to office, we have lost about 3 million private sector jobs—I think it is about 2.2 million overall jobs because the Government was actually increased. So, literally, it is the worst jobs record since the Great Depression. Currently, the situation is not exactly getting better. In the month of February we created 21,000 new jobs in this economy. That is against a projection that was in the President's economic report to the country of presuming that we would produce 368,000 jobs per month. It was 21,000 in reality against a projection of 368,000; none in the private sector, by the way.

What 21,000 were created were created in the governmental sector. I again contrast that with the fact that under the policies of the previous administration, we created 236,000 jobs a month on average. Right now, on average, we have negative creation under the current economic policies, and before we have done any kind of analysis, we want to attack the kinds of proposals that actually lead us back to fiscal sanity and responsible funding of our Government. We would get on with job creation.

If we had the right leadership, we would pass this jobs bill that is on the Senate floor right now and get forward momentum building in our economy.

By the way, if we were to continue that pace of 21,000 jobs, just to replace the jobs we have already lost under this administration, it would take us to 2013, a remarkably slow pace. This is not what President Bush promised